

The Family Devotional Table, Part Two¹

Last month I wrote of doing devotions at home as a family. This month I want to focus on the role of worship in the devotional life. Sometimes it's thought that going to church is the end goal—the final stop after a series of preparatory events. That is, if we hook people in with activities, and dinners, and even cool outreach, they will come to church.² Actually, the opposite is usually the case. People who are active in worship are active in all of these other areas. *Worship is the end (goal) but also the impetus for a devotional life.*

First we need to address worship in and of itself. Worship very often feels like and seems like we are doing things for God. We are giving praise, singing hymns, and publicly giving our gifts and offerings. *We* worship. We are certainly involved, but a right understanding of worship starts with *what God is doing*. And what He is doing is **giving**. *Worship is where God gives His gifts.* We are in worship to receive them. For God is the agent and the actor. He is the giver. He gives His forgiveness (spoken by a pastor), He gives His Word, which instructs and nourishes and convicts and again, forgives. He gives His very body and blood. AGAIN, for forgiveness and strength and nourishment. We respond in prayer, in thanksgiving and praise. But worship is the place where God delivers the goods.³

What does worship have to do with home devotion? *Everything*. If we aren't fed routinely in Word and Sacrament, it is likely we won't be fed at home. Worship on Sunday (the first/eighth⁴ day) sets the tone and rhythm of the entire week.⁵ We are anchored in the routine of starting our week by receiving the gifts of God. The rest of the week, then, flows from that practice. The *daily* devotional life is predicated on the *weekly* worship practices you have.

I want you to consider something. The very first Christians, worshipping in their homes, were entrenched in the *habit of worship*. We are told in Acts 2:42ff, that those who were added to the Church 1) devoted themselves to the apostolic teaching 2) and the fellowship 3) and the breaking of the bread (holy communion) 4) and the prayers. *This was all based on worship*. Their life was communal and they shared all as any had need, *but the worship of Christ was what bound them together*. They were not atomistic individuals, compartmentalized and segmented, held tenuously together by a loose affiliation. Their lives revolved around the worship of Christ, receiving His gifts together. The Body of Christ.

It is from worship then, that the devotional life flows. So, let's go back to your dinner/lunch/breakfast tables. There are several things that worship gives your table. As

¹ If you are reading this and haven't read the February or March articles, stop, go and read those and then come back! If you need copies, contact me and I will email them or print them off.

² Snarky, but that sometimes is the thought process.

³ This is really the "problem" with virtual worship. God can certainly deliver the goods of His Word online, but the body and blood of Jesus must be eaten and drank. There is something lost in virtual worship, something incarnational that doesn't translate.

⁴ The eighth day is the day after the seventh, that is, *the eternal day of the new creation*.

⁵ Any calendar or routine that lists Monday as the first day of the week is to be avoided!

discussed, the weekly rhythm. As well, the Church also establishes the seasonal and yearly calendar. **Devotions at home are an extension of what is happening in worship, both in content and in time.** Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, etc. all sets the table for devotional practices. The worship life is brought home. God’s written word, the hymns of the church, the formal creeds, the prayers...all of these things are part of a family devotion.⁶ The liturgy of the Church, the forms and practices, also give the family the *language* of devotion. For instance, how does every single service begin? With the invocation. “In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Same with family devotion. The invoking of God’s Triune Name signals His presence and brings to remembrance the reason for gathering together. Another example. Making the sign of the cross. This ritual gesture, done so often in worship, marks you as God’s baptized and redeemed child and sets your devotional time apart.

If devotions are tried at home *without* worship in a congregation, it is very difficult to get devotions off the ground. It’s like trying to get in shape without a gym membership or workout routine. Or trying to grocery shop without a list or meal plan. If you are reading this, chances are that you already go to church on a regular basis. But the encouragement is to let the worship life of your congregation *feed* your devotional practice. If you are reading this and not going to church, then start today!⁷

Worship also gives you the imagery of a devotional life. For those of you with little children or grandchildren, worship imagery is a great way to tie in *what is seen at church and what is done at home*. So, the rhythm, the language, and the images of worship of the Church inform devotion, and then devotion reflects what is done in worship. The two things begin to support one another. Two-year-olds can be taught at home to say simple responses and make basic gestures, to be done in worship. Older children can see the patterns in the liturgical year in what is studied at home.

So, the family table becomes the center of “home worship”. The head of the household is the “pastor” to his family—delivering God’s Word to those he cares for. I advocate the family table, for as argued earlier, it is the center of the house and the place where most frequently people are gathered together. This is why *The Congregation at Prayer* was developed—to give the head of the household language and practices that are built-in and provided without having to come up with something on your own.⁸

The Rite of First Communion

Did you know that we have a rite of First Communion (prior to Confirmation)⁹? Some of you I have talked to show complete surprise at this. “I thought you had communion when you got

⁶ *The Congregation at Prayer* utilizes all of these things in devotion.

⁷ Seriously, what are waiting for? An invitation? I invite you!

⁸ Again, *TCAP* is a tool to help you! Modify it as needed but use it.

⁹ This is found in *The Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, prepared by *The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 2006), 25.

confirmed? I thought that was in 8th grade?” That may have been the practice *when you grew up*, or when your child went through, but I can assure you, first communion and confirmation as a rite **were never meant to be joined together**. As to why this happened, that is a longer story.¹⁰ But I want to talk *about why we should do a first communion (prior to confirmation) and how it works*.

The general notes in the *Lutheran Service Book Agenda* says, “This rite is intended to be used to admit to the Lord’s Supper baptized children who have not yet been confirmed.” There is no age or grade specification, as there is not one for confirmation! So, as to what is required for admission, the notes go on to say, “Candidates for admission...have learned the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer.” This is consistent with The Augsburg Confession Articles XXV and what Luther suggests in the Large Catechism.¹¹ Besides this basic requirement, the candidate should have “careful instruction in the Gospel and Sacraments.” The last element needed is the awareness to confess one’s sins and an ability to “examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” (1 Corinthians 11:28). For whoever “eats of the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner”, Paul says they “will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.” (11:27)¹² The ability for confession of sin and self-examination is necessary for admission to the Sacrament of the Altar.¹³

Careful reading of the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the worship rubrics used in the LCMS shows that there is **no age requirement**. Some people will default to “tradition”. “That is not our tradition Pastor!” Any “tradition” one might have should always be anchored in Scripture and the Confessions. Human “traditions” often extend *only* to what was done in one’s lifetime. In other words, they do not go any further or any deeper! Don’t get me wrong—traditions are very important and are to be honored! But if “traditions” develop that obscure faithfulness or a clear word of Scripture, or even a better practice(!), *then traditions can and should be amended*.

Fortunately, we have tradition on our side! It was the practice of the Ancient Church as well as the Lutheran reformers to commune *anyone* after a period of instruction. *The usual age in the time of Luther was 7-8 years old*. This brings back in the question of age question. The better way to think about it: **is the candidate able to receive instruction and articulate a confession of sins? Are they able to commune with reverence?** If those are the standards, then one could see baptized children from ages 6-12! The quick and cheap answer is that it is *case by case, candidate by candidate, child by child*. We are so used to thinking of things strictly in terms of grade level, that this seems almost “unfair”. But most recognize that within grades there are all

¹⁰ I haven’t come across any studies on the topic, but my educated guess is that it had a lot to do with parochial schools needing to manage the process with bigger groups of kids.

¹¹ That is for *anyone* to receive the Sacrament, regardless of age!

¹² In this context, Paul is not discussing requirements for entry but abuses. Still, the admonition is that people must take the Supper unworthily, frivolously, or without regard for the real presence.

¹³ It goes almost without saying that we would never want anyone to take the Supper lightly or irreverently.

kinds of variation with respect to maturity, self-awareness, and teachability. In short, *some kids are ready before others*.

So, what is the upshot? What is to be gained? Lots! Look...the problem with *unnecessarily* yoking first communion with confirmation is that it **creates a sense of graduation**. “I’m done with this church stuff!”¹⁴ We have parties, and gowns, and corsages, and yes, first communion as the carrot dangled to complete the class. But what if...we took it upon ourselves to train our children in the basics, instructed them in home and at church, as early and often as possible?¹⁵ How much *more* would that child of God be grafted into the community of faith (earlier), receiving this gift from God’s hand (faithfully)? If it’s about “understanding” and “comprehension” then I have to admit, I DON’T **UNDERSTAND HOLY COMMUNION AND THE REAL PRESENCE**. But I confess it, and receive it by faith. So should those who are fit.

Practically, once the child receives this *basic* instruction,¹⁶ and then are examined by their pastor, they would undergo *a short rite as part of a worship service*. They stand and confirm(!) that they are ready to receive this invitation to the table in the presence of the congregation. The congregation in turn promises to pray and support them in faithful reception. The candidate then takes communion that day with the congregation in the usual order.

Let me leave you with some words from Luther, from the end of the Large Catechism’s section on the Sacrament of the Altar. He writes, “Therefore, let all the heads of household remember that it is their duty, by God’s injunction and command, to teach their children or have them taught¹⁷ the things they ought to know. Because they have been baptized and received into the people of Christ, they should also enjoy this fellowship of the sacrament so that they may serve us and be useful. For they must all help us to believe, to love, to pray, and to fight against the devil.”¹⁸

If you are interested in getting your child ready to receive the Sacrament and go through the Rite of First Communion, please contact the pastor (that’s me). If you have more questions regarding this practice, also contact me (that’s the pastor). If anyone would like to read the rite in detail, please see the pastor for a copy of the *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*. Lastly, some will ask, “Do any congregations/pastors do this?” Absolutely. Lots. And hopefully more and more. So, if you want some examples, let me know!

Post Script—THIS BY NO MEANS IS MEANT TO GET RID OF CONFIRMATION.

¹⁴ I want you to honestly assess whether the current practice across most of the Synod is working to keep kids in church after confirmation.

¹⁵ In other words, catechesis is lifelong and ongoing. It is not a class you have for a couple years and then you’re done.

¹⁶ This by no means is meant to get rid of Confirmation.

¹⁷ The responsibility is **both** the parents and the pastor. But the parents have to do their part!

¹⁸ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Lutheran Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 476, LC, 87.